



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ART. VII. — *The Monks of the West, from St. Benedict to St. Bernard.* By the COUNT DE MONTALEMBERT. Authorized Translation. In Two Volumes. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons. 1861. 8vo.

THE work of which this is a translation was reviewed in our pages shortly after its appearance. We have placed the English version at the head of the present article, in order to present a somewhat fuller sketch than M. de Montalembert gives of the rise of monastic institutions in the East, and especially of the life and services of St. Anthony, the founder and father of Christian monasticism.

Nowhere was Christianity more generally diffused in the third century than in Egypt; but at the same time it nowhere encountered more corrupting influences, being brought face to face, on the one hand, with a philosophy which consented to take on the new religion rather than submit to it, and, on the other, with the wild and sombre superstitions native to the soil. Christian doctrine among the more cultivated was crystallized in Platonic moulds; Christian life among the less cultivated ran perpetually into asceticism. Illustrious before all others among the latter class was Antonius, or St. Anthony, as he is commonly called. He was born about the year 251, in the little village of Coma, on the confines of the Thebaid, or Upper Egypt. He belonged to an old Coptic family, and there is reason to believe that he remained through life ignorant of the Greek, and, indeed, of every language except the Coptic, in which there already existed a version of the Old and New Testament. He received a simple, pious education, but no literary training. It has been currently stated by ecclesiastical historians, that he never learned to read, but committed the entire Bible to memory by hearing it read. This impression, however, seems to have originated from the too literal interpretation of a single sentence in his Life by Athanasius, — a sentence whose apparent import is contradicted by subsequent passages in the same work.

Before he had completed his twentieth year his parents died, and he was left with an ample fortune, and the sole

guardianship of a younger sister. His wealth was from the first a perplexity and a burden to him ; and one day, as he was meditating on the contrast between himself and the primitive Christian community, whose members gave up their property, and had all things in common, he entered a place of worship, and heard for the Gospel of the day the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus. He took the lesson to himself in its literal sense. He gave his landed estate to the inhabitants of the village, on the sole condition that he and his sister should never be called on for taxes. He sold all his movable property, and, reserving a scanty provision for his sister, distributed the residue of the proceeds among the poor. Shortly afterward, hearing from the Sermon on the Mount the Saviour's injunction to take no thought for the morrow, he gave to the poor the remnant of his property that he had reserved for his sister, and commenced a life of rigid asceticism.

His first residence was not far from his native village, in a grotto which had served as a tomb. At the age of thirty-five he repaired to a deserted and dilapidated tower, in which he lived as a hermit for twenty years. Here he tilled a little patch of ground, and raised vegetables for his own use and for the refreshment of his occasional visitors. He also wove baskets, which he compelled those who at times brought him food to receive in exchange for their benefactions. In both these residences he represented himself as having been engaged in frequent personal conflicts with the powers of darkness, and as having received bodily harm from them. The foul fiends tempted him, at first, by placing before him means of illicit indulgence in the most alluring forms. They spread before him tables covered with the most delicious viands. They assumed the shape of beautiful women. They piled heaps of gold in his path. Then they pressed around him in their native hideousness, scourged him, tore his flesh with their talons, chased him from his cell. He heard the most fearful sounds. Lions, tigers, wolves, dragons, were at the same moment roaring, shrieking, howling, hissing in his ears. As the legend says, (and we doubt not with entire truth so far as the interior consciousness of the saint was concerned,) when these horrors had reached their climax, and the power

of endurance was exhausted, there shone upon him a great light from heaven, and his waning strength was reinforced as by the might of Omnipotence, and, lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said: "O Lord Jesus, where wast thou in those moments of anguish?" Christ replied, in a mild and gentle voice: "Anthony, I was here beside thee, and rejoiced to see thee contend and overcome. Be of good heart; for I will make thy name famous through all the world." These temptations, with their intervening seasons of relief and triumph, were believed by Anthony to have had an objective reality. The probability is, that solitude and fasting induced a dreamy condition of mind, in which it was impossible for him to discriminate between phantoms of the imagination and actual objects of sight and sound. The internal conceptions were so distinct and lifelike as to be attended with the same mental evidence of their reality that is usually conveyed through the senses, while there was nothing in his religious belief to lead him to doubt their actual existence. Indeed, it is not an uncommon experience to have conceptions entirely without objective counterparts, as clear and vivid as sensations. In such cases we ascertain the purely subjective character of what we seem to see and hear, not by our own consciousness, but by knowledge — derived from without — of the absence of the persons or the non-occurrence of the events thus conceived of. We, of course, doubt not that our saint's warfare was within, and he sustained it as a good soldier of the cross. This hermit-life, with its struggles and its victories, was the Heaven-appointed discipline for him, — the surest means, no doubt, of training him for his peculiar post and mode of service to the Church and to his race.

He continued to live in solitude till the age of fifty-five; not wholly useless, indeed, for no good man can be useless. Superior excellence always works its way to the light. One can no more hide it than he can smother fire with linen garments. Anthony's reputation for sanctity drew to him many visitors, who derived from him Christian counsel and consolation. Even a nomadic tribe of Saracens that pastured their flocks in his neighborhood, awe-stricken by his venerable aspect, were wont to bring their rude tribute for the supply of his necessities, and were indebted to him for humanizing influences.

When he was fifty-five years old, his public life commenced. He began to preach, and multitudes from great distances assembled to listen to him. The sick were brought from every part of Egypt to be cured by his prayers, and they often went away relieved and benefited, no doubt by the power which ardent faith and strong excitement exert over the vital organs and functions. He was especially successful in what was believed to be the casting out of demons, that is, the restoration of the insane, whose wildest paroxysms of madness were often subdued by the holy eloquence of his prayers, and by the atmosphere of tranquillity and peace which always encompassed him. But what most emphatically attests at once the integrity and the force of his character is, that, while the seeming agent in effecting marvellous cures, he steadily disclaimed the possession of miraculous gifts. "To do wonders," said he, "is not our work, but the Saviour's"; and to a military officer, who applied to him in behalf of an invalid daughter, he said, "I also am a man like thyself; if thou believest in the Christ whom I serve, only depart, and pray to God in thy faith, and it shall be done."

Disciples gradually gathered around him, desirous of consecrating themselves to a life like his. As they multiplied, he formed them into communities, and established for them strict rules of devotion, diet, dress, labor, intercourse with the world, and general conduct. Christian hermits there had previously been in great numbers; but these societies were the earliest bodies of cenobite Christian ascetics, and the type of the monastic fraternities to which the Church undoubtedly owes a larger indebtedness than to any other institution that has originated within its borders for the last sixteen centuries,—an indebtedness which we can hardly consider as cancelled by the enormous corruptions and iniquities that have had the cloister for their seminary, and the world for their field.

Here it may not be without interest and profit for us to mark the operation of a general law, to which sufficient heed has not been given in the philosophy of history. Institutions that live are never founded; they grow up spontaneously. Their origin is not in calculation, but in exigency,—in what

the irreligious term accident, the devout, Providence. They crystallize around some existing need, and retain for ages after that need has been forgotten the shape which it gave them. A man who in cold blood plans an organization or a mode of action which he designs for the remotest posterity, often survives his enterprise, and hears its requiem. He, on the other hand, who does with wisdom and vigor the best that he can do to meet a new posture of circumstances, and has no thought beyond the work of his own time, leaves his mark on the coming ages, and posterity praise him for a foresight, which with him was nothing more than keen insight. Wesleyan Methodism is a case in point. Wesley's organization was suggested, in its successive stages, by the urgent wants of the converts that had been made under his auspices within the pale of the English Established Church, and was designed merely to keep alive within that pale the fire which he had kindled; it has become, not only an independent church, but, next to the Papacy, the most powerful hierarchy in Christendom. In like manner, Anthony simply thought to retain in the fear and service of God the zealous neophytes who clustered unbidden around him; and in so doing he founded an institution which for centuries gave law to the whole Christian world, and was mightier than all the thrones in Europe.

Anthony established in person two monasteries,—one in the mountainous region of Eastern Egypt, where he had so long dwelt; the other near the town of Arsinoe. In these the monks lived, each in his own separate hut or cell, but in close proximity, under one superior, and under common regulations. The only remaining step, which was soon taken, was the substitution of a conventual building for the cluster of dwellings.

Anthony resided generally at one or the other of these establishments, but often made pilgrimages to the towns and villages, and on rare occasions to Alexandria. During the persecution under Maximilian, he went to Alexandria, anxious to win a martyr's palm; but, though he threw himself into the forefront of peril, the government probably did not dare to do violence to a man whose sanctity of life had won hardly less veneration among idolaters than among Chris-

tians. His last visit to Alexandria was on the restoration of Athanasius, the bishop, after his banishment by the Arians. He was then a hundred and four years old. His journey was like a triumphal procession, and his way was thronged by multitudes eager to obtain a glimpse of the great saint, and to implore his blessing. When he preached, large numbers of pagans, and their very priests, were among his hearers, and during those few days more converts from Paganism were made than were wont to be gathered into the Christian fold in as many years.

Among the incidents of his life — which doubtless had its substratum of fact, though it has come to us only in a legendary form — was his visit, in extreme old age, to a certain Paul, who had lived as a hermit in a frightful solitude for ninety years. The legend says that Paul was so ignorant of the world which he had deserted, as to ask whether there yet remained any vestiges of idolatry. While the venerable men were conversing, a raven came, and dropped a small loaf between them, whereupon Paul lifted up his eyes, and blessed God, and said: "For sixty years every day hath this raven brought me half a loaf; but because thou art come, my brother, the portion is doubled, and we are fed as Elijah was fed in the wilderness." Then Paul announced his own death as close at hand, and sent Anthony home for a cloak which Athanasius had given him, that he might wrap him in it for his burial. When Anthony was on his return, at about three hours' journey from the cavern, he heard strains of "the most ravishing music, and, looking up, he beheld the spirit of Paul, bright as a star, and white as the driven snow, carried up to heaven by the prophets and apostles, and a company of angels, who were singing hymns of triumph." Arrived at the cavern, he found the lifeless body of Paul; and while he thought with despair of his own waning strength, and felt himself utterly unable to dig a grave, two lions came toward him over the sand, and performed the office to which he had found himself inadequate. The meeting, the cloak, the burial, are probably authentic; the supplementary incidents, expanded as they are into a minute narrative, are among the most picturesque and touching memorials of a legendary age.

We have spoken of the change, midway in Anthony's life, from a carefully guarded solitude to a career, still of rigid asceticism, yet of active duty. It is probably to this transition period that the following legend belongs ; and it grew, no doubt, out of the simple story of some inward experience, or of a casual interview with a Christian of lowly surroundings and eminent sanctity, which contributed motives to the change in his mode of life. Having put a period to the assaults of Satan, and flushed with the honors of so signal a victory, according to the legend, Anthony began to think himself the holiest man on the earth, whereupon a voice from heaven came to him, saying : " Anthony, thou art not so perfect as is a certain cobbler dwelling at Alexandria." So he took his staff, and set forth in search of so wonderful a man. Arrived at his house, Anthony said : " Declare unto me thy good works and thy whole manner of life ; for it has been revealed to me that thou art the holiest man on the earth." The cobbler replied : " Good works have I none ; for my life is but simple and slender. I am but a poor cobbler. In the morning when I rise, I pray for the whole city wherein I dwell, especially for all such neighbors and poor friends as I have. Afterward I seat myself at my labor, at which I spend the whole day in getting my living. I keep me from all falsehood ; for I hate nothing so much as I do deceitfulness : wherefore, when I make a promise to any man, I perform it truly. Thus I spend my time poorly with my wife and children, whom I teach and instruct, as far as my wit will serve me, to fear and dread God. And this is the sum of my simple life."

Many of Anthony's recorded sayings give us in him glimpses of a truly great soul, and of a soul as lowly as it was great. If there had ever been in him a taint of the spiritual pride suggested by the legend just quoted, it was all washed away before his public career began. Even imperial flattery could not elate him. When the Emperor Constantine wrote to him with expressions of the profoundest reverence, and invited him to come to Constantinople, the monks around him were deeply impressed with the honor thus rendered to their spiritual father. But he said : " Wonder not that the Emperor

writes to us; for he is a man : but wonder much rather at this, that God has written his law for men, and has spoken to them by his own Son." In his answer, he first of all congratulated the Emperor and his sons that they were Christians, and, begging them to remember that Christ is the only true and eternal Sovereign, he gave them a plain, pungent exhortation to justice, meekness, and the care of the poor. Severe to himself, he was uniformly mild and lenient in his treatment of others. A monk for some transgression had been expelled from his cloister, and his brethren were unwilling to receive him back on his profession of penitence. Anthony sent him back to them a second time with these striking words : " A ship, stranded, lost her cargo, and was with difficulty drawn to the shore ; but ye are for sinking again at sea what has been thus safely brought into the harbor." To a blind teacher at Alexandria, Anthony said, on his last visit to that city : " Let it not trouble you that you are in want of the eyes with which even flies and gnats can see ; but rejoice that you have the eyes with which angels see, by which, too, God is beheld, and his light received."

When Anthony perceived that his own death was near at hand, he was most of all solicitous that his mortal remains and his grave should not be desecrated by the vulgar superstition of relic-worship, which was then rife in Egypt, or rather which had passed with little change from Paganism into the Christian Church ; for from time immemorial, in that country, the honored dead, embalmed and reposing in state, had filled almost the office of household gods. He begged his monks to keep the place of his burial carefully concealed. Having exacted this promise from them, with mind undimmed, with faith as clear as sight, and occupied continually on heavenly themes, he watched with complacent hope the kindly decay of nature, and at length sank into painless dissolution in the one hundred and sixth year of his age.

As he was no scholar, it may be doubted whether we have any genuine productions of his own mind, except those brief and pithy sentences, a few of which we have quoted, which were treasured as they fell from his lips, and were written down by his disciples in nearly the words in which they were

uttered. There remain twenty epistles attributed to him; but of these only seven bear any marks of genuineness, and it is more than probable that even these were written after his decease. The whole twenty were translated from the Coptic into Arabic in the ninth century, and from Arabic into Latin in the seventeenth.

That the secrecy enjoined as to the place of Anthony's burial was ever violated, we have no reason to believe; but the Romish Church can show the bones of every titular saint that ever lived, as also those of many who never existed except in the fossil state, and of course it would not be destitute of authentic relics of so great a man. His pretended bones are deposited at St. Didier-la-Mothe, in France, and in the Middle Age it was believed that many miraculous cures were wrought at his grave. His intercession has ever been highly esteemed in the Church, and has been especially prized as a prophylactic against that terrible form of erysipelas named from him St. Anthony's Fire.

Anthony has been a favorite subject of Christian art, and his temptations, his interview with Paul, the burial of Paul, and his own death-scene, have furnished rich materials for the highest artistical treatment. In pictures he wears the monk's cope and cowl, and has a crutch to denote his age and infirmity, a hand-bell, and a reed for sprinkling holy water to indicate his successful conflicts with Satan. A swine is generally placed under his feet, in memory of the foul temptations which he subdued and trampled under foot, and flames of fire are often around and beneath him, with reference either to the flames of hell quenched by his piety and his intercession, or else to the fearful disease bearing his name, which spreads like a flame over the face and body of its victim, charring and blackening the flesh over which it passes. Highest of all honors, he is commonly painted with the letter Θ or T , the initial of the divine name $\Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$, conspicuous on his cope or brow, to designate his place among those who in the apocalyptic vision stand with the Lamb on Mount Sion, "having his Father's name written in their foreheads." Well might he be numbered among those happy spirits, of whom the seer goes on to say, in words of unequalled significance and beauty,

“These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men. And in their mouth was found no guile : for they are without fault before the throne of God.”

We fully accord with the verdict passed upon Anthony's character by his contemporaries and successors on the arena of Christian faith. Tried, indeed, by the light of the first or of the nineteenth century, his asceticism and self-chastening are not among the prescribed duties or tokens of Christian discipleship. But they were in accordance with the best Christian sentiment of his time. Nor between the apostolic age and the Protestant Reformation can we select any other specimen of the Christian character, which will bear like his to be viewed in every light, and will appear faultless in all. If we except what we deem to have been sins against his own body, among the copious notices of his life we can find not a deed or word or recorded thought of his which was not in perfect harmony with his character as a follower of Jesus. He united gentleness with courage, rigid self-discipline with tolerance for the frailties and forbearance toward the sins of others, humility with energy, love with zeal, the severe virtues of the anchorite with the winning graces of the apostle.

Asceticism, in its various forms of abstinence from food, seclusion, needless self-denial, and useless self-torture, has played a very large part in the history of religion and of civilization. The idea on which it rests, and the practices which it has sanctioned, may be traced to Media and Persia, and to the religious system of which Zoroaster is commonly named as the founder, and which he at least reformed and consolidated. There is no vestige of asceticism in either the Jewish or the Christian religion. The Mosaic law appointed not so much as a fast ; there is no trace of such an observance as a national solemnity till the reign of Jehoshaphat ; nor of fasting as a stated religious ordinance till after the Babylonish captivity, from which the Jews brought away many Zoroastrian notions and practices. Zoroaster divided the empire of the universe between two semi-omnipotent beings, Ormuzd and Ahriman, the former supremely good, the latter utterly evil and malignant. Some sects of his followers maintained

that Ormuzd created the soul of man; Ahriman, the human body and the material universe. On this theory fasting and bodily mortification were regarded as the most effective method of resisting and defying the evil spirit, and of bringing the soul into harmony with its Creator. In the sect of the Esenes this philosophy took shape among the later Jews, and in the form of Gnosticism it found its way into the Christian Church. Fasting, living on pillars, celibacy, and self-inflicted austerities of all kinds were from this foreign stock ingrafted on Christianity, and became influential elements in its history.

In what remains of this paper, we have to speak only of a single offshoot from the Persian dualism,—that which was planted and cherished by St. Anthony. The worst that can be said of monasticism is that it has outlived its ministry. With regard to every institution, whether of society, government, or religion, *obsolete* and *corrupt* are convertible terms. That which no longer has a rightful office, can exist only as a hinderance to the right. That which no longer has work to do, can do only mischief. That which survives its functions and utilities, survives only in the ghastliness of death and the corruption of the sepulchre.

In the age of Anthony, and for many subsequent generations, monasticism vindicated itself as an ordinance of God, and filled a place essential, not only to the working and the diffusion, but, humanly speaking, to the very existence of Christianity, as also to the preservation of its records. The early cenobites, so far from being idle pensioners on the unmerited bounty of their brethren, sustained themselves in the most frugal style of living by the labor of their own hands. Many of them were simple, unlettered men, who elsewhere would have been nothing more than laborers, but who elsewhere might not have remained disciples. Christian homes would indeed have been better for them than monasteries; but the choice often was between a monastery and a Pagan home,—between repose of spirit among kindred souls, and the strife and bitterness of a house divided against itself,—between a shelter against apostasy, and influences in behalf of apostasy which no ordinary strength of character could have withstood.

The monasteries, too, were always open refuges for the persecuted, — refuges needed not only against the ferocity of heathen monarchs, but often equally against the caprice and violence of emperors and magistrates Christian only in name, or the alternate ascendancy of Arians and Athanasians when each party strove to crush the other out of being. They were seminaries of Christian education, where the youth or the neophyte was imbued with heavenly wisdom, and fortified against the thronging temptations and trials that beset the religious life. They were “schools of the prophets,” and sent forth those ministers of the cross who in times of declension renewed in some measure the purity and zeal of better days, and preserved for the Church some features of its Founder’s image and spirit. They furnished missionaries who courted peril, sought inhospitable climes and savage tribes, and planted Christian communities far beyond the outermost verge of Greek and Roman civilization. All along through the Middle Age they were asylums for the oppressed, the forsaken, the poor, the helpless, inns for the wayfarer, hospitals for the sick and wounded, — the only sanctuaries which violence dared not to invade, the only shrines where heaven-born charity lingered on the earth. Through their agency alone learning crossed the chasm that yawned between ancient and modern civilization, and the treasures of antiquity were made the choicest wealth of these latter ages. They were almost the sole repositories of manuscripts, and we doubt whether without them we should now have the text of a single classic author. Indeed, they often preserved materials of inestimable value by the very process of defacing and destroying. In covering parchments which they could not appreciate with worthless legends of their own fabrication, the monks did not succeed in obliterating the traces of the original writing, and long-lost works have been disinterred from beneath the pious rubbish to which they had given place.

Above all, we are indebted to the monasteries for the preservation and the integrity of the Christian Scriptures. In the estimation of their inmates the transcribing of these sacred records was the holiest of occupations, and it was a matter of conscience with them to be severely accurate. They had too

profound a reverence for the word of God to deface it by comments or conjectural readings of their own. Thus the only discrepancies were such as could hardly fail to grow from the occasional ambiguity or illegibleness of the manuscript copied from, or from the mistakes of eye or pen from which the most careful transcriber might not be wholly free. For several centuries even the parish priests hardly ever possessed copies of the Scriptures; kings and nobles could seldom read; what learning still remained was confined within cloister walls; and but for the monasteries the mummary of so-called Christian worship might have been perpetuated, while Christian sentiment and consciousness would have been irrevocably darkened and perverted, nor would the sacred records have continued extant to preside over the awakening of Christendom from its age-long slumber, and to kindle the faith and piety of the morning stars of the Reformation. But through the monasteries in various Christian lands the Scriptures were not only transmitted, but transmitted by so many separate and unconnected channels as to make the coincidence of the several families of manuscripts an impregnable argument for the genuineness and antiquity of the sacred books. Spanish, Roman, Greek, and Alexandrian manuscripts must needs have been propagated from copies that bore date very near the period of authorship claimed for their originals; and if they have come down to us with no greater discrepancies than time and human fallibility will account for, the inference is irresistible that they all sprang from a common source, and that source the fountain of inspiration, from which holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Even since the Reformation, the monasteries have given birth to almost all in the Romish Church which has borne the stamp of superior excellence. Her self-denying missionaries, her self-sacrificing priests, her prelates and pontiffs most worthy of their sacred office, her authors who have made valuable contributions to the stock of Christian learning and devotional sentiment, have, with very few exceptions, been educated under monastic training and influence, when they have not themselves been cenobites. The very book which no devout Protestant disdains to place next to the Bible, as embodying

more of its spirit than any work that has appeared since the Apostolic age, "The Imitation of Christ," was the fruit of cloister discipline and monastic piety, and its author was distinguished for the rigidity of his adherence to the rules of his order, and for his loyalty to its interest and honor.

But monasticism has long since discharged its ministry, and survives as a mere cumberer of the ground. Its true work was in the ages of violence and ignorance. Its appointed office was as "a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn and the day-star arise." The world has outgrown its uses. Christian consciousness has passed beyond its rudimentary training. Christian culture has transcended its imperfect and provisional standard. It is in its very nature incapable of expansion or diversity of adaptation. It can henceforth nurture little except idleness, superstition, and vice. Yet while we look upon its glory and its excellence as among the things which have been and never more can be, we may well honor it for the noble work that it has wrought, and for the benefactors of our race whom it has given to the world. And all honor be to the memory of that great man of God who, when the deluge of ignorance and barbarism was impending, — not, as we believe, without Divine monition and guidance, — prepared the ark in which all that is most precious to our faith and piety rode intact and sound upon the surging flood, to rest on the Ararat of a reformed Church and a renovated humanity.